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AN INTERVIEW WITH SARA DODD

Sara Dodd is a British ceramic artist, known for her innovative use of hand-rolled porcelain ribbons. Sara shares how her Welsh upbringing, global travels, and transformative firing techniques shape her use of colour and tactile textures.

CG What led you to the unique approach of using hand rolled ribbons of porcelain to create wafer-thin ceramics? And, how did you evolve this technique to create your 'Decipher' series?

SD The Decipher series began after returning to making after almost a year away from my studio. I was looking for a way to reconnect to the material and get my hands back into clay without having a clear image of what I wanted to create. I began ripping small amounts of clay from the bag and rolling them out along my desk, the more I rolled the more delicate the clay became. Eventually forming ribbon like lengths of porcelain. Each ribbon has a subtle torn edge, adding to that sense of uncertainty about the material. The edge is reminiscent of frayed fabric or torn paper.

It was a happy accidental discovery from creating ribbons that were too wide and carefully tearing along its length rather than reaching for my knife to cut it. These wound into shapes that form the Decipher surface. My hands work intuitively and quickly, insuring that the porcelain doesn't dry out before I can form it into delicate curves.

CG After working alongside two renowned British ceramicists, Kate Malone and Katharine Morling, how did you evolve your artistic vision?



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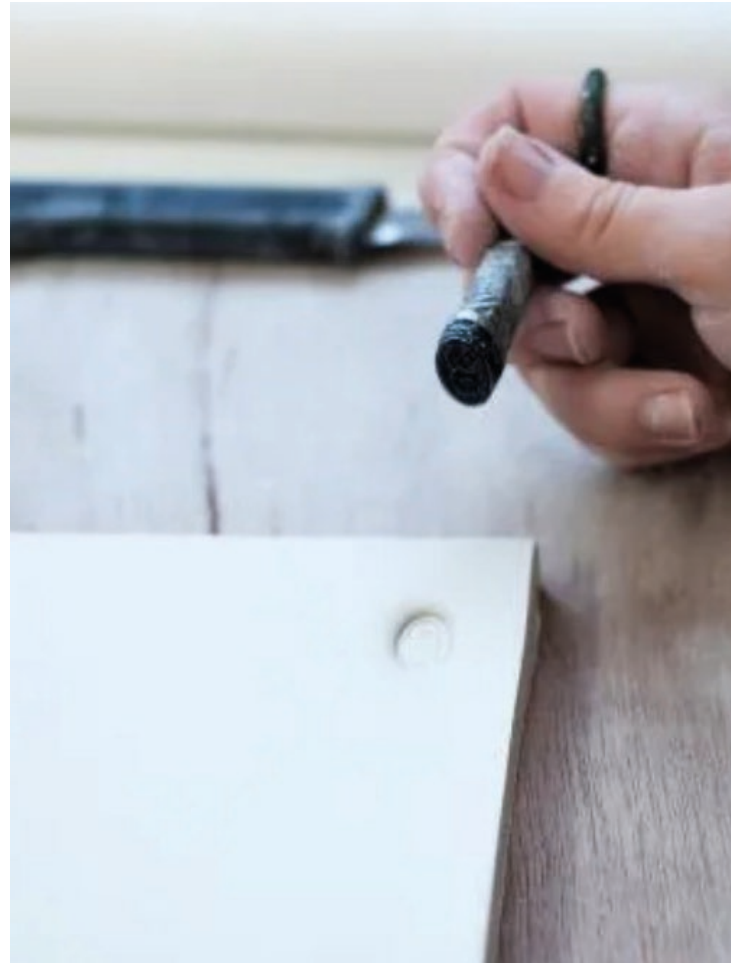
SD I feel very fortunate to have worked alongside two such well-established female artists, assisting them in their studios. Seeing first hand the work ethic and dedication they both applied to their crafts, helped me develop an appreciation and ongoing fascination for the variety that can be achieved with the ceramic medium.

CG **What made you decide to focus on your own work, and did you face any challenges during this transition?**

SD I'd worked part time and as an assistant for a number of years, slowly building up more days in my own studio. I think it's a common difficulty for studio assistants that its harder to maintain a creative space to make your own work whilst also making work for somebody else. Once I started to make more regular sales, I decided it was a moment to take a leap and go out on my own.

CG **You have described being influenced by your surroundings, from the natural world to your childhood in Wales, can you tell us more about how these elements remain part of your artistic vision today?**

SD I love Wales and still visit several times a year. Every time we go walking, taking in the grey blues of the mountains through water



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colour studies and photographs. It's a palette that features heavily in my work. Something will catch my eye, a colour combination, or a quality of light. I try to keep my eyes open to discover and absorb the things that surround me.

Last year I hiked the Annapurna mountains of Nepal. It gave me the chance to discover a fresh colour palette filled with rich greens and oranges, I have recently been experimenting and putting these into larger works.

CG **Your work with ceramics involves a transformation during the firing process. Can you elaborate on this method?**

SD Firing the clay itself is an important tool - the extreme temperatures inside the kiln create unpredictable moves and shifts. Embracing this dynamism, my pieces capture a moment in time from the firing. Each outcome is a balance of design and chance, capturing freedom and individuality.

CG **Could you go into more detail about why you are drawn to porcelain as a medium, and how its unique qualities play a role in your artistic vision?**

SD I am drawn to using porcelain for creating my wafer thin strata for its strength

and delicacy.

The Royale porcelain I use has a smooth texture and warm off white colour that is beautiful on its own and takes my colour pigments well.

Light interacts with porcelain in a beautiful way, it is integral to create the paper thin layers of my work. Each torn, uneven edge catches the light and is illuminated while casting shadow to the layer behind. This play of light draws the eye, directing it from one layer to the next and creating intimacy in the my pieces. It's this luminosity of porcelain that is so intriguing for me. The pleasure of its change within the kiln, there can be surprises waiting for you when it's opened. To work with clay and turn a wet, malleable material from the earth and fire it into something permanent in ceramic is a privilege.

CG For your pieces featuring colour gradients, how do you decide which pigments to incorporate into the clay body for a particular piece? Is there a colour palette you are more attracted to using?

SD I carry out a lot of testing before bringing the colours into the work. I look for colours that are stable and interesting enough to create a gradient, not just one good shade. To create the range I'll hand mix different percentages of the colour, from 10 % down to fractions of a gram at 0.1%. I definitely have colours that I revisit, but I'm always working to expand my palette and I have been becoming more bold using contrasting bright colours.

CG Considering the delicate and brittle nature of porcelain, your pieces manipulate human perception to suggest a softness akin to silk fabric or petals, what is your intention behind this material transformation?

SD Porcelains high firing temperature gives it a strength beyond other ceramic materials, I can only create the thinness and the intricate edges of my pieces because of this. People are often tempted to touch my pieces, expecting it to be soft and then they are delighted to discover it's porcelain. The torn, uneven edges have a tactile nature, at shows I often have small pieces in my pockets to bring out to share with visitors. I enjoy those interactions, the visual misconceptions, that it might be paper or fabrics with the solid, jagged porcelain.





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